

"fifties" Mr. James Cox, of Clarendon, imported one or more from Victoria along with two Native Companions, and others were introduced somewhat earlier.

When in 1802 some members of Baudin's French expedition landed on King Island they were informed by a sealer named Cowper that small, dark Emus were plentiful on that island, and that he himself had killed about three hundred, consequently some have thought that the Emu which used to exist on that island was identical with the extinct Black Emu (*Dromæus ater*) of Kangaroo Island, while some bones lately received by the National Museum of Melbourne from King Island\* also bear out the same thought, as they are very much smaller in every way than the mainland birds, and approximate closely to those of *D. ater*, but more bones must yet be received before the matter can be settled.

It is much to be regretted that so little information can be obtained about the extinct Tasmanian birds, and it is to be hoped that our Tasmanian members of the Aust. O.U. will still endeavour to discover some Emu remains.

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## Description of a New Sub-species of *Mirafra*.

BY ROBERT HALL, F.L.S., C.M.Z.S.

EIGHT specimens of *Mirafra*, or Bush-Larks, from Broome, N.-W.A., agree among themselves while conspicuously varying from other species in so far as there is no rufous colouring, with only the palest isabelline over portions of them. The lateral or terminal parts of each feather, which are either strong rufous or pale rufous in the known Australian species, are in these birds almost white, while the greater portion of each feather is brownish-black, so that the contrast is great.

What attracts the eye at once is that these specimens appear black and white dorsally and pale cream ventrally. The Australian *Mirafra* that I have so far handled have been dorsally strong or pale rufous or brownish, and ventrally strong or pale rufous. Consequently these birds appeal to me as representing a sub-species. It is a well-known fact that certain desert birds distinctly guard themselves in the matter of colouration by agreement with their surroundings. My correspondent, Mr. J. P. Rogers, has collected these particular eight birds on ground that has the birds assimilating in colour with it. He further states to me that on a part of the Fitzroy River, N.-W.A., where the ground is greyish the birds are greyish, but that the majority on the Fitzroy are chocolate, because the ground is of that colour. On the Robinson and Meda Rivers, Mr. Rogers further states, the birds are brown, in agreement with the brown soil. On the Ashburton River, near Onslow, from where Mr. A. W.

\* *Emu*, vol. iii., p. 113.

Milligan received his type,\* the ground is very rufous, and so red and friable that Mr. Rogers has seen a cloud of it above the river when he was fifty miles away from it. As the colour of the ground is so is the colour of the *Mirafra*. Accordingly a knowledge of the large areas of varying soils and the *Mirafra* associating upon them should, in my opinion, give us a complete and proper list of this genus, with all but the type ranking sub-specifically.

The light-coloured specimens, which I shall refer to as *M. horsfieldi pallidus*, are from Roebuck Bay Plains, N.-W. Australia. Six are males, two females; collected between 25th and 30th October, 1902. Soft parts.—Bill—upper mandible deep brown, lower pale yellowish, the tip being as upper mandible; legs and feet pale brown; irides brown.

[This is another case which the committee appointed at the last annual meeting of the Union to inquire into the vernacular naming of our birds, and the necessity of a revision of our tentative Check-List, should investigate. "As the ground is so is the colour of the *Mirafra*," says Mr. Hall; also that "certain desert birds distinctly guard themselves in the matter of colouration by agreement with their surroundings." Without for one moment throwing doubt on Mr. Hall's right to class the bird he describes as a new sub-species—it would be presumptuous on my part to do so—may one not ask whether in a case where colouration depends upon environment, and where also this abnormal colouration is largely (not altogether) relied upon as a basis for a new type, the matter should remain in abeyance until further evidence be available? An instance cited by Mr. A. W. Milligan in the present issue of *The Emu* (*re Drymaëdus brunneopygius*), wherein he admits that he "cannot detect any differences between Eastern and Western forms," confirms one in his doubt whether ornithologists have not been running to extremes in giving new names to sub-species of birds. In America they have been abolishing many sub-species which on further inquiry would not justify their existence. We should do so here.—H.K.]

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LITTLE PENGUINS.—It might interest you to know that a pair of Penguins nested this spring on the shore in front of my house. The main coast road at this point runs within a few feet of the beach, and the nest was in the embankment of the road. The birds were there for upwards of two months, in spite of the fact that the average traffic on the road amounts to at least 40 vehicles per day, practically passing over their heads; besides which on more than one occasion they were pulled out of their hole to be exhibited for the curiosity of visitors.—C. ROSS MACKENZIE. Somerset (Tas.), 10/1/04.

\* *M. woodwardi* (Rufous Bush-Lark), *Vict. Nat.*, vol. xviii., No. 2, p. 25.